

K-12 School Guidance for COVID-19

(Revised March 29, 2021)



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH SERVICES

This guidance outlines recommendations for K-12 schools to prepare for and respond to community spread of COVID-19 based on CDC's K-12 [Operational Strategy](#) and [Indicators for Dynamic School Decision Making](#), and Arizona Department of Education's [Roadmap to Reopening Schools](#). LEAs are encouraged to continue to partner with their [local health department](#).

Mitigation Strategies

Regardless of the level of community transmission, all schools should use and layer mitigation strategies. Schools should prioritize the following **key mitigation strategies**:

- Universal and correct use of [masks is required](#)
- Physical distancing
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and maintaining health facilities
- Contact tracing in combination with [isolation and quarantine](#)

Phased mitigation and learning modes

At any level of community transmission, there are options for in-person instruction (full or hybrid) for all schools by strictly using mitigation strategies.

- In-person learning for elementary schools is likely to have less risk of in-school transmission than for middle schools and high schools.
- Families of students who are at increased risk of severe illness or who live with people at high risk should be given the option of virtual instruction regardless of the mode of learning offered.
- In-person instruction should be prioritized over extracurricular activities including sports and school events, to minimize the risk of transmission in schools and protect in-person learning.
- Schools are encouraged to use cohorting or podding of students to facilitate testing and contact tracing, and to minimize transmission across cohorts.
- Students, teachers, and staff who are at high risk of severe illness or who live with people at high risk should be provided virtual options.

Indicators: Community Transmission to Reflect Level of Community Risk

The first step in determining when and how to safely reopen schools involves assessing community transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. CDC recommends the use of two indicators of community burden to determine the level of community transmission. These indicators are used to assess the incidence and spread of COVID-19 in the community, not the school itself. Risk is dependent on community level transmission **and** implementation of school and community mitigation strategies.

Indicator	Low Transmission	Moderate Transmission	Substantial Transmission	High Transmission
Total new cases per 100,000 persons in the last 7 days	0 – 9	10 – 49	50 – 99	≥ 100
Percentage of nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) that are positive during the past 7 days	<5.0%	5.0% – 7.9%	8.0% – 9.9%	≥ 10.0%

Recommended Implementation of Mitigation Strategies and K-12 School Learning Modes by Level of Community Transmission

Low Transmission	Moderate Transmission	Substantial Transmission	High Transmission
Key Mitigation Strategies: Universal and correct use of masks is required; physical distancing ¹ ; handwashing and respiratory etiquette ² ; cleaning and maintaining health facilities; contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine.			
Sports and extracurricular activities: physical distancing of 6 feet or more, to the greatest extent possible ³	Sports and extracurricular activities: physical distancing of 6 feet or more	Sports and extracurricular activities: occur only if they can be held outdoors, with physical distancing of 6 feet or more	Sports and extracurricular activities: virtual only
Diagnostic testing⁴: Symptomatic students, teachers, and staff and close contacts referred for diagnostic testing			
K-12 schools open for full in-person instruction		Elementary schools in hybrid learning mode or reduced attendance ⁵	
		Middle and high schools in hybrid learning mode or reduced attendance	<p>Middle and high schools in virtual instruction unless they can strictly implement all mitigation strategies and have few cases.</p> <p>Schools that are already open for in-person instruction with successfully implemented mitigation strategies can remain open, but only if they continue to strictly implement mitigation strategies and have few cases⁶</p>
The items listed below include additional recommendations for schools choosing to perform routine COVID-19 screening testing.			
Screening testing for teachers and staff⁷: Routine screening testing of teachers and staff offered once per week			
Screening testing for students⁸: None	Screening testing for students: Routine screening testing of students offered once per week		
K-12 schools open for full in-person instruction		K-12 schools in hybrid learning mode or reduced attendance	

¹Schools should establish policies and implement structural interventions to promote physical distance between people. Students in classrooms should be at least 3 feet apart. In areas of high community transmission, middle and high school students should be 6 feet apart if cohorting is not possible and at least 3 feet apart if cohorting is implemented. Six (6) feet of distance should be maintained between adults, between adults and students, when masks can't be worn (e.g., when eating), during activities when increased exhalation occurs, and in common areas such as lobbies and auditoriums.

²Individuals should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used. Encourage staff and students to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and immediately throw the tissue out and wash hands.

³School officials should implement limits on spectators and attendees for sports, extracurricular activities, and school events as consistent with recommendations for masking and physical distancing for each phase.

⁴Diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2 is intended to identify the occurrence of SARS-CoV-2 infection at the individual level and is performed on individuals with or without suspected COVID-19 infection in accordance with the test's authorization and labeling. Diagnostic testing includes PCR and antigen tests.

⁵Hybrid learning or reduced attendance is intended to maximize physical distance between students. Schools may consider hybrid learning models or instructional modes where substantial percentages of students are in virtual-only instruction. At all levels of community transmission, schools should provide families the option to participate in virtual learning if a student or family member is at risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

⁶Strict implementation of mitigation strategies refers to policies that require consistent and correct use of masks, physical distancing of at least 6 feet to the greatest extent possible, and all other key mitigation strategies.

⁷Screening testing is intended to identify infected asymptomatic individuals who may be contagious so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission.

⁸Schools may consider testing a random sample of at least 10% of students or may conduct pooled testing of cohorts/pods for screening testing in areas of moderate and substantial community transmission.